



Sheik Luqman Raheem

Small Iraqi village shows what working together can accomplish

A small town in north Baghdad Province provides a positive glimpse of Iraq's future.

Assriya Village, located outside Camp Taji, has about 4600 residents representing all sects.

"Assriya" in Arabic means "modern" and its name exemplifies the way residents treat each other. They worked together to build a Women's Center that officially opened in August and today that facility is producing apparel for children.

The \$230,000 400-square-meter facility includes 12 sewing machines and 12 computers to encourage female business opportunities. Local residents have sewn dozens of dresses, sold many in the local market, and are now looking to expand their business enterprise.

They're working with Camp Taji to open a store there. They're also contacting Baghdad merchants about the possibility of selling their apparel.

Col. Debra Lewis, Commander of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers (USACE) Gulf Region Central District, recently visited the facility and talked to those operating it. "It's great to see the community's positive outlook and pride in what the Center represents."

Col. Lewis brought with her 16 boxes of fabric, thread and other sewing items donated by Americans wanting to help. (The Daughters of the American Revolution and Seattle churches are among those supporting the effort.) Six of the local women who are part of the work force all expressed their sincere appreciation.

Col. Lewis says she plans to continue seeking stateside support for this effort, and doing whatever else she can, after seeing the impact this facility is having on that community.

On a sad note, the local village's leader, Sheik O'Rahman Hama Raheem, was kidnapped on a trip into Baghdad in December and later killed. He was the town's biggest advocate to get the Women's Center up and running. His son, Sheik Luqman Raheem, has stepped in and is continuing his work. Sheik Luqman thanked Col. Lewis for the donations saying it helps local families better their lives.

The 414th Civil Affairs Battalion at Camp Taji was responsible for getting the project funded through the Commanders Emergency Response Program. USACE oversaw the construction of the facility.



Col. Debra Lewis checks the professional quality of the apparel being produced at the Assriya Women's Center in north Baghdad Province.



A variety of children's apparel is displayed for sale at the Assriya Women's Center.



Col. Debra Lewis shows the contents of one of the 16 boxes of fabric and sewing materials donated by Americans wanting to help the Assriya Women's Center.

